

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
-----050551 141227Z /41

R 141153Z JUL 77
FM AMEMBASSY LONDON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6089
INFO AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM
AMEMBASSY GABORONE
AMEMBASSY LAGOS
AMEMBASSY LUSAKA
AMEMBASSY MAPUTO
AMEMBASSY PRETORIA
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK
USMISSION GENEVA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LONDON 11569

EXDIS

GENEVA FOR AMBASSADOR YOUNG

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: PDEV, RH, UK, US
SUBJECT: RHODESIA: OWEN'S MOOD

1. BASED ON OUR RECENT CONVERSATIONS WITH THOSE CLOSE
TO THE FOREIGN SECRETARY. DAVID OWEN IS GOING TO
WASHINGTON NEXT WEEKEND IN A GLOOMY MOOD AND GROPING FOR
ALTERNATIVES TO HIS SPUTTERING INITIATIVE ON RHODESIA.

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HIS CONFIDENCE IS WEAKENED, HIS ENTHUSIASM FADED. AND
HIS BOLDNESS STUNTED. WE BELIEVE THE POINTS BELOW
MIGHT PROVIDE A USEFUL BACKGROUND NOTE FOR THE SECRETARY
BEFORE HE SEES OWEN JULY 23.

2. OWEN SINCERELY WANTS BRITAIN TO DISCHARGE ITS
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COLONIAL RESPONSIBILITY TO CREATE MAJORITY RULE IN
RHODESIA. HE KNOWS THAT THE CONSEQUENCES OF FAILURE TO
ACHIEVE A NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT COULD BE DISASTROUS FOR
THAT COUNTRY AND FOR BRITAIN'S INTERESTS THERE. AS THE
SECURITY SITUATION INSIDE RHODESIA DETERIORATES SO WILL
BRITAIN'S RELATIONS WITH THE SURROUNDING BLACK STATES;
AS THE LOCAL CONFLICT INCREASES SO WILL THE CHANCES OF

MAJOR ESCALATION AND OUTSIDE INTERVENTION. AGAINST THIS BACKGROUND, BRITAIN'S ABILITY TO EFFECT A NEGOTIATED SOLUTION SEEMS MORE AND MORE REMOTE AND LONDON'S ROLE LESS AND LESS RELEVANT. OWEN SENSES WITH FRUSTRATION THAT THE TRADITIONAL FORM OF ROUND-TABLE CONSTITUTIONAL DECOLONIZATION--A PROCESS AT WHICH THE BRITISH HAVE EXCELLED IN THE PAST--NOT ONLY APPEARS DISCREDITED IN THE RHODESIAN CONTEXT, BUT PERHAPS EVEN OUT OF DATE.

3. WHILE THE IMMEDIATE RESULTS OF FAILURE IN RHODESIA ARE BAD ENOUGH, OWEN FEARS THEY MAY LEAD TO EVEN MORE SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES. IF THE RHODESIA CRISIS CANNOT BE RESOLVED SOON, BLACK AFRICA WILL INCREASINGLY DEMAND THAT THE WEST GET AT THE RHODESIA PROBLEM BY GETTING AT THE SOUTH AFRICANS. WE ESTIMATE THE BRITISH ARE ALREADY BEGINNING TO THINK ABOUT THE UNTHINKABLE--SANCTIONS AGAINST SOUTH AFRICA--BUT IT IS A CAREFUL, GRADUALIST, LONG-TERM VIEW. IF SOUTH AFRICA MUST BE SQUEEZED, THEN THE PRESSURE SHOULD BE MEASURED AND PHASED BECAUSE BRITISH INTERESTS THERE ARE SO ENORMOUS. OWEN DOES NOT WANT HIS SOUTH AFRICAN HAND FORCED BY THE INTRUSION OF AN ESSENTIALLY SHORT-TERM ISSUE LIKE RHODESIA (OR NAMIBIA FOR THAT MATTER). OWEN IS NOT PREPARED TO ACCEPT SUDDEN DEMANDS FOR DRASTIC ACTIONS AGAINST SOUTH AFRICA, BUT HE SUSPECTS WE ARE. AND HE MOST WANTS TO AVOID THE STRAINS ON THE ANGLO-AMERICAN RELATIONSHIP

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THAT WOULD INEVITABLY ARISE FROM AN URGENT DEBATE ABOUT SOUTH AFRICA. RHODESIA THEREFORE THREATENS TO DRAG BRITAIN INTO A DILEMMA OF MAJOR PROPORTIONS.

4. OWEN FEELS MOST LET DOWN BY HIS CABINET COLLEAGUES. HE MISCALCULATED THE REACTION OF THOSE IN THIS GOVERNMENT WHO OSTENSIBLY HAVE NO INTEREST IN REMOTE AFRICAN AFFAIRS, BUT THEY IN FACT SAW OWEN'S PLAN AS RECKLESS AND RISKY FOR A GOVERNMENT WITH SUCH A TENUOUS GRASP ON ITS OWN POLITICAL SITUATION AT HOME. THE SUGGESTION THAT BRITISH FORCES BE COMMITTED TO A POTENTIALLY UNSTABLE TRANSITION PERIOD APPEARED TO OWEN'S COLLEAGUES TO BE GROUND WHERE EVEN FOOLS WOULD FEAR TO TREAD. WE ALSO SUSPECT OWEN COUNTED TOO MUCH ON THE SUPPORT OF JAMES CALLAGHAN, WHO IN THE PAST HAS ENCOURAGED THE FOREIGN SECRETARY ALL ALONG THE WAY. BUT WITH DEEP POLITICAL DIFFICULTIES AT HOME, AND AN ALREADY DIVISIVE AND CANTANKEROUS CABINET, THE PRIME MINISTER LIKELY JUDGED THAT RHODESIA WAS NOT THE IDEAL ISSUE TO FORCE CONFRONTATION AND DISPUTE AMONG HIS MINISTERS. FOR CALLAGHAN, THE IDEA WAS GOOD BUT THE TIME WAS BAD. STILL OWEN FEELS BETRAYED, AND FRUSTRATED THAT HIS BOLD DE-

SIGN HAS BEEN SCRATCHED BY FELLOW MINISTERS WHO. HE
THINKS, LACK THE WILL AND DETERMINATION THAT THE SITUA-

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
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TION DEMANDS. BRITAIN'S SEEMING INWARDNESS AND IMPO-
TENCE GRATE AGAINST OWEN'S VIGOROUS NATURE.

5. THOSE CLOSE TO THE FOREIGN SECRETARY INDICATE THAT
OWEN HAS BEEN PLEASED BUT NOT ECSTATIC WITH AMERICAN
COOPERATION AND SUPPORT DURING THE CURRENT INITIATIVE.
HE ASCRIBES AT LEAST SOME OF THE CAUTION OF HIS CABINET
COLLEAGUES TO A PERCEIVED RELUCTANCE OF THE UNITED STATES
ITSELF TO BECOME TOO CLOSELY ASSOCIATED WITH HIS
EFFORTS. HE FEELS, VAGUELY, THAT WE GAVE IN TOO QUICKLY
ON THE ISSUE OF "CO-SPONSORSHIP" OF A CONFERENCE; THAT
WE DRAGGED OUR FEET IN MOVING FORWARD ON THE FORMATION
OF A CONSULTATIVE GROUP; THAT WE SWITCHED AGREED SIGNALS
AT THE MAPUTO CONFERENCE; THAT OUR OFFER OF LOGISTICAL
AND TRANSPORT ASSISTANCE FOR AN INTERNATIONAL FORCE IN
RHODESIA WAS TARDY AND TEPID; THAT OUR APPROACH TO THE
ZIMBABWE DEVELOPMENT FUND IGNORES THE POLITICAL
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REALITIES; THAT WE NARROW NEGOTIATING POSSIBILITIES BY
LEANING TOO FAR TO ONE SIDE. OWEN KEEPS NO SCORE CARD.
HE IS NOT INCENSED; BUT IT RANKLES.

6. FINALLY, OWEN DOES NOT QUITE BELIEVE THAT HIS OWN
MINISTERIAL SPEAR, LIKE SO MANY OTHERS BEFORE, IS
CRACKING AGAINST THE RHODESIAN SHIELD. THREE MONTHS AGO
HE WAS FLYING HIGH, PLEASED THAT HE PERHAPS HAD THE LONG
ELUSIVE FORMULA FOR RHODESIA AND THAT HIS OWN PERSON-
ALITY WAS THE CATALYTIC FACTOR. HIS YOUTH AND
ELECTRICITY BROUGHT GLAMOUR TO A BEDRAGGLED CABINET; HE
WAS HAILED IN THE PRESS; HE EXUDED CONFIDENCE IN HIMSELF
AND DISDAIN FOR THE FAINT-HEARTED. HE KNEW THE CHANCES
WERE LONG, BUT A VIRTUOSO SUCCESS IN RHODESIA WOULD
CONFIRM THE WISDOM OF HIS APPOINTMENT AND DRAMATICALLY
ASSURE HIS OWN POLITICAL FUTURE. NOW IT HAS ALL GONE
FLAT.

7. OWEN IS HARD-DRIVING AND WILL NOT THROW UP HIS HANDS
IN DESPAIR JUST BECAUSE HIS PLAN HAS NOT WORKED. HE IS
ALREADY LOOKING FOR NEW POSSIBILITIES AND NEW COMBINA-
TIONS FOR RHODESIA. THE FOREIGN SECRETARY IS NOT A
WOE-IS-ME CHARACTER; BUT HE IS COMING TO WASHINGTON
FRUSTRATED, WITH A BITTER TASTE IN HIS MOUTH. NOT A
LITTLE CYNICAL BUT PERHAPS A LITTLE WISER.

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